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ABSTRACT

The exploration of fencerows as an outdoor teaching technique is described. The concepts that can be developed as students walk down the fencerows are related to science, life styles, and economy. By dividing a class into small groups, a teacher can employ problem-solving techniques in fencerow exploration. The following group topics are possible approaches; animals, microclimate, soil, and fence scouting. It was noted that fencerow exploration is one of many outdoor activities which help to build understandings, identify and solve problems, form judgements, and intensify interest in and appreciation of the world in which we live. (PS)

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OUTDOOR EDUCATION

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EXPLORING FENCEROWS - AN OUTDOOR TEACHING TECHNIQUE

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Plants such as weeds, trees and shrubs located in fencerows or hedgerows are found across much of the American landscape. The mower cannot reach the plants and they are free to continue their existence. Many native trees and grasses continue to flourish. There are many stories that fencerows can unfold to one who explores them carefully.

The study of fencerows by a group of children can be both adventurous and educational. Most farms, both old and new, have fencerows bordering fields and roadways. Wherever they are found, fencerows can be a constant resource for investigation by children. The evolution of present day fences can be unfolded as one travels the countryside making observations of the many different kinds of fences that are found. Many fencerows still contain the remnants of the fences of yesteryear.

There are many concepts that can be developed as youngsters walk down the fencerows. These concepts do not have to be related to only science, for fencerows can tell a great deal about the lives of people and their economy. Fencerows can reveal a great deal of information about the landowners, whether they were poor or prosperous, energetic or lazy, careful or careless, civic-minded or apathetic.

Fencerow examination can also reveal whether the fences were necessary for stock, were created by deposits resulting from land clearing, or had some other purpose for their existence.

Very often the selection of the type of fencerow was dependent upon desired wildlife and appropriate cover. In some cases a particular type of fencerow was selected because of its ability to improve the condition of the land and increase wildlife. Sometimes it just grew without attention from the farmer.

Mature fencerows are usually best for observing their contribution to the stabilization of soil because time has allowed for dramatic contrasts. There is no one best season for fencerow exploration, for each season offers a unique challenge to the explorer.

By dividing a class into small groups, a teacher can employ problem-solving techniques in fencerow exploration.

The following questions and group topics are offered as possible approaches:

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Group 1. Animals of the Fencerow

a. Does the fencerow provide adequate shelter for wildlife?
b. Can you find any animal homes in the vegetation of the fencerow?
c. Are there any animal holes in the ground? (near or in fencerow?)
d. Does the fencerow have adequate food to attract wildlife?
e. Is there other evidence of wildlife near the fencerow? (droppings, half-eaten seeds, tracks?)
f. How many different kinds of animals live near or in the fencerow?

Group 2. Microclimate of the Fencerow

a. Does the fencerow slow down the wind? Measure the wind speed on both sides of the fencerow.
b. What is the temperature in the fencerow? Is it warmer or cooler than the open field?
c. What is the temperature near the top of a tree? At the base of a tree?
d. How does the climate of the fencerow affect the animals and insects living there?
e. What is the temperature of the fencerow at different times during the day? Compare each temperature to that of the open field.
f. Is the air temperature in a hole in the ground cooler or warmer than the temperature found in the open?

Group 3. Soil of the Fencerow

a. Are there any signs of erosion in the fencerow?
b. Is the soil of the fencerow richer or poorer than that of the open field?
c. What is the moisture content of soil near the fencerow? Compare it to that of the open field.
d. Does the fencerow collect wind blown soil dust? How?
e. Is the level of the soil near the fencerow higher or lower than that of the field?
f. What is the compactness of the soil near the fencerow?
g. What is the rate of water absorption in the fencerow? Compare it to that of the field.

Group 4. Fence Scouting

a. What kinds of fences were used before the fencerows developed? Were they made of native materials or manufactured materials?
b. Does the fence indicate whether the farmer was rich or poor, energetic or lazy?
c. Why was the fence built?
d. Does the fencerow interfere with modern techniques of farming?
e. Should the fencerow be removed? Should the fencerow remain? Why?

These are just a few of the questions which might be outlined by a class and teacher before they engage in a fencerow study. The recording of experiences and activities is an important part of fencerow exploration. Through these records, learnings of local history may be organized, clarified, and reinforced for future use. The observations should be recorded first while in the field and then later transformed in the classroom into well organized data. Fencerow exploration is just one of the many outdoor activities which help to build understandings, identify and solve problems, form judgments, and intensify interest in and appreciation of the world in which we live.